

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

EB-07 IO-13 OMB-01 PC-01 DEAE-00 /084 W

----- 030062

R 272105Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6994

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ECON, PINS, PORS, CO

SUBJECT: CRIME IN COLOMBIA

REFERENCE: BOG A-95, BOG A-109, BOG 8331

SUMMARY. THIS TELEGRAM PRESENTS AN ABSTRACT OF BOGOTA A109 WHICH REVIEWED THE AVAILABLE STATISTICS ON CRIME AND THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM IN COLOMBIA. THE AIRGRAM AND THIS TELEGRAM ARE MEANT AS COMPLEMENTS TO BOGOTA A-95 AND BOGOTA 8331 WHICH LOOKED AT SOME OF THE LONG TERM ECONOMIC VARIABLES AND FOUND THE NUMBERS MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AT FAVORABLE SPEEDS. THE CRIME STATISTICS IN CONTRAST ARE MOVING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION AT VERY DISTURBING SPEEDS. THE CRIME GROWTH RATE, IN FACT, IS MOVING SO FAST THAT THE ONLY PREDICTION THAT CAN BE MADE WITH ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY IS THAT THE GROWTH AND ACCELERATION RATES CANNOT CONTINUE FOR LONG. THE PURPOSE OF A-109 AND THIS TELEGRAM ARE TO CALL ATTENTION TO THESE DISTURBING TRENDS. END SUMMARY.

1. CRIME RATE. CRIME, AS MEASURED BY REPORTED FELONIES, HAS BEEN INCREASING AT AN INCREDIBLE RATE. WHILE THE STATISTICS MAY REFLECT IMPROVING POLICE EFFICIENCY, IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT THIS IS NOT THE CASE, THAT IN FACT THE NUMBER OF CRIMES GOING UNREPORTED IS GROWING

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EVEN FASTER THAN THE REPORTED CRIMES, SO THAT THE

STATISTICAL BIAS MAY BE TOWARD UNDERESTIMATION, FROM 1958 TO 1968 THE CRIME RATE INCREASED BY ONLY 3.8 PERCENT A YEAR, OR SLIGHTLY FASTER THAN POPULATION GROWTH AS A WHOLE AND BELOW THE URBANIZATION RATE. FROM 1968 TO 1974 THE RATE INCREASED BY 11.9 PERCENT A YEAR BUT WAS ACCELERATING SHARPLY. FROM 1971 TO 1972 THE RATE INCREASED BY NINE PERCENT; FROM 1972 TO 1973 BY 15.4 PERCENT AND FROM 1973 TO 1974 BY 46 PERCENT. THE RATE OF ACCELERATION (OVER 70 PERCENT AND ALSO ACCELERATING) CLEARLY CANNOT CONTINUE. PROJECTIONS OF THESE RATES GIVE RIDICULOUS RESULTS RESULTS IN WHICH, BY THE END OF 1977, CRIME WILL HAVE DOUBLED THREE TIMES AND SOON BEGINS TO DOUBLE MONTHLY AND THEN DAILY. EVEN BY HALVING THE GROWTH AND ACCELERATION RATES THE RESULTS SOON BECOME LUDICROUS. CONTINUATION OF THESE KINDS OF GROWTH RATES IS SIMPLY NOT REASONABLE FOR EVEN A VERY FEW YEARS OR CRIME WOULD TOTALLY ENGULF THE ECONOMY AND COLOMBIA WOULD BE LIVING IN CHAOS AND CRIMINAL ANARCHY. THE CRIME RATE IN THIS DECADE MAY BE A FLUKE COMBINATION BETWEEN IMPROVED STATISTICS, IMPROVED POLICE EFFICIENCY, AND AN ABERRANT SHORT-TERM INCREASE, BUT IF IT IS NOT, THEN SOMETHING HAS TO HAPPEN TO CHANGE THESE GROWTH RATES. THERE NEEDS TO BE SOME CATALYST, SOME TURNAROUND, SOME ENDOGENOUS SHIFT OR EXOGENOUS IMPULSE AND IT IS THE POSSIBILITY OF SOME WRENCHING CHANGE THAT SHOULD MAKE THE SUBJECT OF INTEREST TO COLOMBIA WATCHERS.

2. CAUSES OF CRIME. THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM USUALLY PLACES THE BLAME FOR CRIME IN COLOMBIA ON INCOME DISTRIBUTION, UNEMPLOYMENT AND OTHER ECONOMIC VARIABLES. WHILE THESE ECONOMIC VARIABLE UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE SOME EFFECT, THE CAUSES ARE FAR MORE COMPLEX AND THERE ARE MANY FAR MORE SIGNIFICANT VARIABLES SUCH AS THE EFFICIENCY OF POLICE, THE JUDICIAL AND PENAL SYSTEMS, THE ATTITUDES OF THE PUBLIC TOWARD EACH OF THESE, CULTURAL AND OTHER ATTITUDINAL FACTORS BEYOND ECONOMICS THAT CREATE PREDISPOSITIONS TO COMMIT CRIME. THE REFERENCED AIRGRAM (BOG -A-109) GOES INTO THIS QUESTION A BIT MORE THOROUGHLY, CONCLUDING THAT THERE IS PROBABLY A COMPLEX AND HIGHLY EXPONENTIAL MODEL THAT CAN EXPLAIN THE RECENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SHARP INCREASE IN CRIME RATE. THIS MODEL CAN BE REDUCED TO ECONOMIST'S SIMPLICITY, FOR EXPOSITION PURPOSES, INTO A RISK-YIELD FUNCTION IN WHICH A WEALTHY PERSON COULD HAVE A GREATER ECONOMIC INCENTIVE TO COMMIT CRIME THAN A POOR PERSON BECAUSE THE RICH FACE A VERY LOW RISK OF BEING CAUGHT; AND IF CAUGHT, A LOW RISK OF BEING TRIED. AND, IF TRIED, A LOW RISK OF BEING CONVICTED. THE VERY POOR, IF CAUGHT, STAY IN JAIL AT LEAST UNTIL TRIED AND THAT

MAY BE MONTHS OR EVEN YEARS. THUS THE ECONOMIC VARIABLES (YIELD) CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM THE INSTITUTIONAL VARIABLES (RISK).

3. RISK. THE COLOMBIAN JUDICIAL , CRIMINAL AND PENAL SYSTEMS ARE IN RAPID DECLINE. THERE WERE OVER ONE MILLION

CASES AWAITING JUDICIAL PROCESS AT THE BEGINNING OF 1974. THIS INCREASES BY OVER 300,000 A YEAR, YET ONLY A FRACTION OF THESE ARE PROCESSED. THERE IS A BACKLOG OF 7,000 MURDER CASES, GROWING BY 10,000 A YEAR, YET THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM CAN HANDLE A MAXIMUM OF 4,500 A YEAR AND IN 1973 HANDLED ONLY 2,314. WITH NO NEW MURDERS, IT WOULD TAKE FROM 18 TO 35 YEARS TO ELIMNATE THE BACKLOG. THE RESULT IS A HIGH PRISON POPULATION--135 PER 100,000, OF WHOM 78.5 PERCENT ARE STILL AWAITING TRIAL OR A JUDICIAL DECISION. SEVENTY-TWO PERCENT OF THE CASES ON WHICH SOMETHING HAPPENS EACH YEAR--CONVICTION, FINDING OF INNOCENCE, ETC., ARE PERSONS BEING RELEASED BECAUSE THE STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS HAS RUN OUT ON THE CASE. THESE FACTORS NOT ONLY AFFECT THE RISK INVOLVED IN COMMITTING A CRIME AND AFFECT ATTITUDES TOWARD THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM, BUT MAKE CORRUPTION OF THE SYSTEM INEVITABLE, INDEED ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.

4. YIELD. YIELD TO CRIME IN COLOMBIA IS DIFFICULT TO GUESS ABOUT. THERE ARE NO RELIABLE FIGURES ON CONTRABAND: ONE MERELY KNOWS THAT IT IS ENORMOUS. CIGARETTE CONTRABAND, WHICH CAN BE REASBABLY ESTIMATED, IS BETWEEN \$30 TO 50 MILLION A YEAR. CIGARETTES ENTER COLOMBIA THROUGH THE GUAJIRA IN ARMED CARAVANS ALONG WITH DOMESTIC ELECTRIC APPLIANCES. THERE ARE LARGE SECTIONS IN EVERY MAJOR CITY CALLED "SAN ANDRECITOS" WHERE ALL TYPES, SIZES, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND VALUES OF CONTRABAND CAN BE BOUGHT. THERE ARE OFFICES IN EVERY MAJOR CITY WHERE IT IS POSSIBLE TO ORDER FROM CATALOGS ALMOST ANY PRODUCT AVAILABLE ON THE WORLD MARKET. MOST STORES CARRY SOME CONTRABAND ITEMS. NEVERTHELESS, THE AMOUNT OF INCOME FROM ILLEGAL EXPORTSAND DRUGS IN 1975 WAS SUFFICIENT TO PAY FOR ALL THE CONTRABAND AND STILL GENERATE A \$200 MILLION SURPLUS ON THE BLACK MARKET ACCOUNT. THIS YEAR THE SUPPLUS IS EXPECTED TO DOUBLE. INCOME FROM THE DRUG TRAFFIC IS ESTIMATED BY DEA, ON THE BASIS OF SEIZURES, AT ABOUT \$150 MILLION A YEAR, NOT COUNTING MONEY EARNED BY COLOMBIANS IN WHOLESALE AND RETAIL NARCOTICS BUSINESS IN THE U.S. THIS INCOME IS ALMOST TOTAL PROFIT AND IS OBVIOUSLY TAX FREE. IF THE DRUG "BUSINESSMEN" SINCE 1970 HAVE INVESTED ONLY HALF OF THEIR INCOME INTO CONTRABAND OR LEGITIMATE

BUSINESS EARNING ONLY 20 PERCENT, THEY WILL NOW HAVE A CASH FLOW WHICH EXCEEDS THE BUDGETS OF THE MILITARY AND THE POLICE, AND BY THE END OF THE DECADE THEY WILL HAVE A CASH FLOW OF THREE QUARTERS OF A BILLION DOLLARS A YEAR. THIS KIND OF WEALTH IN COLOMBIA FACES ALMOST NO RISK OF BEING PENALIZED AND THIS KIND OF LIQUIDITY COULD EXERCISE ENORMOUS POWER IF IT SHOULD CHOOSE TO.

5. IMPLICATIONS. ONE OF THE REASONS PRESIDENT LOPEZ HAS CALLED FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY IS TO IMPROVE THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE. IF THE REFORM CAN SUCCESSFULLY ATTACK THE KEY VARIABLES, THEN THE EXPLOSIVENESS OF THE INTERRELATIONSHIP PORTRAYED IN OUR CRIMEMODEL CAN BE TURNED TOWARD REDUCING THE CRIME GROWTH RATE. IT OUGHT TO BE POSSIBLE TO AVOID SOME WRENCHING CATAclySMIC CHANGE SUCH AS COLLAPSE, COUP OR COOPTION, BUT IF THE NUMBERS REFLECT THE REAL SITUATION AND IF THEY CONTINUES, THEN CATAclySM IS POSSIBLE EVEN IN THIS GRADUALIST CONSERVATIVE SOCIETY. IN THE REFERENCED AIRGRAM SOME QUESTIONS ARE POSE ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE SITUATION, BUT THERE IS REALLY ONLY ONE CONCLUSION POSSIBLE WITH A MORE RIGOROUS STUDY, AND THAT IS THAT THE CRIME SITUATION AND INSTITUIONS INVOLVED REQUIRE CAREFUL WATCHING. SANCHEZ

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CRIMES, CRIME DATA
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BOGOTA08755
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760328-0365
From: BOGOTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760814/aaaaalnj.tel
Line Count: 192
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 JUL 2004 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <20 JUL 2004 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ECT: CRIME IN COLOMBIA
TAGS: ECON, PINS, PORS, CO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006